

Future Soldiers at Pendleton Juvenile Prepare Christmas Care Boxes for Troops

By: Emma Bowen Meyer—*The Pendleton News*

Contributed By: Alison Yancey, Public Information Officer—Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility

Students at the Pendleton Juvenile Correctional Facility are preparing to send out boxes of Christmas cheer to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. On the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, those participating in the Future Soldiers Program formed an assembly line to bundle individual care packages full of goodies to ease the homesickness of military men overseas.

"I feel like it's a good way to give back to the soldiers that are doing so much for us," said a student, 18.

"When I heard about it I knew it was something I could help out with that was a good service," said a 17-year-old student. "I was glad to do it because I really appreciate what they're doing over there. As a strong country, we should help out weaker countries. (The soldiers) are putting their lives on the line and keeping us safe."

"Operation DOC Cares" is a state-wide effort by the Indiana Department of Correction to express gratitude to employees that have been deployed overseas. This effort in the program involved the collection of hygiene products, books, magazines, phone cards, and non-perishable food items at both juvenile and adult facilities throughout the state. Once the donation period ended, the items were sent to Pendleton to be sorted and boxed for the individual soldiers. The Pendleton facility was chosen because it is the only one with a Future Soldiers Program, a program so outstanding that it recently won the 2009 Judge Warren W. Martin Award by the Indiana Correctional Association.

This program separates students who apply and qualify into a military-style unit that operates under a different set of standards. These "Future Soldiers" are fittingly the ones that packed the boxes.

"It made me feel good," said another 17-year-old. "I know if I were in Iraq or Afghanistan I would want to get some things that I can't go out and buy. It helps you realize that someone appreciates what you are doing."

"They were really excited to help knowing the packages are going to soldiers who protect freedom," said Officer DeWayne Cooley, Lead Instructor of the Future Soldiers Program. "I'm trying to get them to respect freedom and understand that freedom is a privilege."

In addition, the Future Soldiers Program offers the students hope, discipline, organization skills, self-respect, and a method to changing their behavior, according to Cooley.



Officer DeWayne Cooley hands supplies to a student to pack into boxes for individual soldiers to brighten their Christmas overseas.

"I wanted to hold myself to a higher standard," said a student, explaining why he applied for the unit. "Growing up I didn't do a lot of good things. And with the economy the way it is, I figured this was the best way to be something better."

With less than a month until his release, the student has plans to visit his family for awhile and then join the Army.

"I've learned leadership and like having a little more freedom than the other units," said a 17-year-old. "I've learned how to take care of myself and to think before I react. Now I know that what I do affects everyone around me."

Upon release he plans to finish high school while working a part-time job and then enroll in the Army.

"I like the physical training the best," said another 17-year-old who is scheduled to be released in one month and plans on joining the Marine Corps. "When I'm in shape I feel like I can achieve more. This is a good start for me. I have hopes."

Cooley, formerly in the Army and still in the National Guard, commented that one of the fundamental building blocks of the program is teaching the kids to respect themselves.

"If they learn to respect themselves, they will learn to respect others and do what is right in their communities," he added. "It is a high honor and privilege to be in this program and to work with these kids."

Alison Yancey, administrative assistant

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Miami Correctional Facility Takes the Initiative to "Bridge the Gap"

By: Ann Hubbard, Public Information Officer–Miami Correctional Facility

Miami Correctional Facility (MCF) is attempting to "Bridge the Gap" between the prison and its surrounding communities.

The facility recently played host to a meeting involving mayors, police officers, county sheriff deputies, parole/probation officers, and substance abuse programs in Miami, Cass, Grant, and Howard counties.

This is the first program of its kind in the state where administrators from MCF are trying to "Bridge the Gap" between the prison and the community in the release of offenders. "When offenders are released from the Indiana Department of Correction to the community, there exists a gap in several areas. Communities forget that the offender who is sent off to serve his sentence in prison will someday come back to their community," said Mary Treadwell, MCF Assistant Superintendent/Operations. Treadwell is the inspiration behind "Bridge the Gap."

Treadwell, along with MCF's other Assistant Superintendent Sally Stevenson, have been visiting with mayors in each community for weeks, trying to develop a forum which will eventually assist the offenders in a successful re-entry back into the community. "Transitioning back into civilian life successfully is even harder now that the economy is bad," Treadwell noted.

"Many people, who have been working all their lives, are without jobs and struggling. What few jobs that



MCF Superintendent Mark Sevier addresses community members about the goals of the meeting.

are available are usually being given to those hardworking individuals, making it difficult for an offender to be successful. There are many things that contribute to an offender's successful re-entry back into society. A job is one of the most important. Without a job, an offender is more likely to resort back to what they know – crime. As a consequence, he returns to prison. This isn't good for anyone," Treadwell said. "The community's crime rate will increase and taxpayers will continue to pay to house these criminals in prisons. It becomes expensive for both the IDOC and the community."

"We don't have all the answers," Treadwell added. "That is why we are reaching out to the surrounding communities to help come up with solutions. It's everyone's problem."

This was the first of several meetings for the counties to begin working together and coming up with solutions. There was an overwhelming desire by the majority to continue meeting and working together and adding other community members to participate.

As the facilitator of the program, MCF Superintendent Mark Sevier said he was really excited about the first meeting. "There was a lot of positive feedback from everyone involved. This is a win-win situation. We hope to assist the IDOC in coming up with ways to 'Bridge the Gap' of re-entry, as well as assisting the communities in maintaining their quality of life. We live and work in these communities too, and thus are very excited to meet and continue working with these individuals in making all our communities a good place to live." ■

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at the facility, enjoyed watching the students display kind-heartedness as they packed the boxes, a trait that is not always exhibited in this setting.

"They enjoy doing things for other people," she said. "They want to do good and this gives them the opportunity."

In all, the students spent four hours compiling 74 boxes full of Christmas cheer.

"They take great pride in being asked to be involved," said Superintendent Linda Commons. "Our staff is proud of our troops and glad to have this opportunity to make their Christmas a little brighter." ■